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CAMOENS

ROBERT W. CRUTTWELL

1837
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CAMOENS

· CAMOENS ·

THE NEWDIGATE PRIZE POEM MCMVII
BY ROBERT W. CRUTTWELL DEMY OF
MAGDALEN COLLEGE OXFORD.

Oxford
B. H. BLACKWELL, BROAD STREET

London
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & CO. Ltd.

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MCMVII.

Spero meliora.

NOTE.

For the fuller understanding of this poem a brief epitome of the main events in Camoens' life may be not unwelcome.

Luis de Camoens, the Portuguese poet *par excellence*, 1524—1580.

1524. Born at Lisbon.

1537—1542. Studied at Coimbra University.

1542. Returned to Lisbon and appeared at Court, whence he was banished (reason uncertain).

1543. Joined Portuguese force at Ceuta. Lost his right eye.

1550. Returned to Lisbon.

1553. Again banished (reason unknown), and sailed for India.

1556. Banished from Goa to Macao for denouncing the officials at Goa. At Macao he held a lucrative post and probably wrote the first six books of *The Lusiads*, a long epic on Vasco da Gama's conquest of India.

1558. While returning to Goa was shipwrecked, and lost everything except his poem. At Goa was thrown into prison.

1569. Arrived at Lisbon, after an absence of sixteen years, poorer than he left it.

1572. Published *The Lusiads*, which had a brilliant success, but put nothing into the purse of its author.

1580. Died in a public hospital, June 10th, in poverty and obscurity.

LUIS DE CAMOENS.

I.

THERE is a haven under summer skies,
  Lapp'd by the faint foam of a land-bound sea,
    And crowned with varied diadem of towers,
  Of vine and olive and dark orangery
    And slopes half-smothered in a snow of flowers.
      In this earth-paradise
  Stands Belem's cloistered silence, its vast floor
    Inviolate, and shrining to all years
    That spot whence Vasco, victor of dead fears,
  Launched on the wide deep for an unknown shore.

II.

And here, 'mid Lisbon's busy hum of men
Going their noisy unimportant ways,
Lurks an old quiet-peopled burial ground
Where thou, great Camoens, slumberest all the days,
Calm brooding genius of the hills around.
And though, in Fortune's train,
The pride of peoples passes by forgot,
And (fate of all who bathe in Fortune's smile)
Thy country sees her day-star set awhile,
The sunlight of thy memory darkens not.

III.

Quiet and slumber:—'twas not so in life!
After long tempest cometh the long lull,
When waves sink back into a windless sea
And spread smooth cradles for the battered gull;
So has God's silence fallen upon thee.
Bitter thy cup of strife—
Lost love, base foemen, weary banishment,
Treachery, shipwreck and an unwept grave:
Such the grim welcome Life to genius gave,
Till the flame flickered and the fire was spent.

IV.

Thou art thy country's prophet: she had dared,
And done, and suffered, but as yet no hand
Had carved her splendours on the scroll of time.
Diniz indeed, the David of his land,
Long since had robed her dreams in pastoral rhyme,
Monarch at once and bard;
But thine it was to take her plastic tongue,
Moulding it deftly to the needs of thought,
And leave it a memorial, wonder-wrought,
Of all that she had ventured, dreamed or sung.

V.

Yet Lusitania for the mind that planned,
The arm that graved her glories, found no place,
But flung him, banish'd, to an alien shore
And hurled her bitterest insults in his face.
Nor, when at length he struggled home once more
Broken—with empty hand,
Save for one fragment of immortal verse—
Did those proud Lusiads whom his muse extolled
Drop him a pittance from their hoarded gold,
But left him beggar to a beggar's hearse.

VI.

And now, when riches cannot raise thy bones,
Too late thy country rears her votive shrine
And loads thine altar with her costliest store,
Hailing thee prophet, reverend, divine.
Had she but heeded thy young voice before
Rolling those epic tones,
Haply her wealth had snatched thee from the tomb,
And thou, a latter Mantuan, hadst sung
A second Aeneid in a daughter tongue,
Throwing thy present glory into gloom.

VII.

Yet what a glory do thy *Lusiads* shed,
Outrivall'd only by the kings of song !
Homer had not disdained, nor Maro spurned,
To watch Da Gama, twice a hundred strong,
Battle the Cape of Storms with helm unturned,
Master the seas, and head
Out to th' unknown, and win an Indian shore—
A new Aeneas on a wilder quest :
And shall we stint the praise thou meritest
Where none but kings excel thy classic lore ?

VIII.

Rather we marvel at th' undaunted soul,
  Thy fire unquenched amid the storm of time,
    Which poured its passion in chameleon blaze
  Of sonnet, epic, ode and amorous rhyme—
    Not feebler for its dissipated rays,
        But like an aureole
  Wreathing a rainbow glory round thy brow:
    So have I seen in some dim Gothic fane
    An oriel, blush'd with many-varied stain,
  Cast one grand sunset on the aisle below.

IX.

Peoples have passed away, their words remain:
  Poet is more than warrior, for deeds die
    And victor follows vanquished into dust;
  Is more than monarch, for kings' memory
    Is but the legend of an empire's lust,
        Its tale of pride and pain.
  They pass, and poet passes, but the tongue
    Of poet and of people changeth not:
    The year of Chaucer's birth-night is forgot,
  His speech immortal as the lays he sung.

X.

Thou art a southern Chaucer : the dead voice
Of rustic Rome is eloquent in thee—
Its cadence softer, mellower its tone,
Like early days remembered lovingly,
And with a liquid music of its own.
'Twas thine to take thy choice
Of phrase and fancy from that gathered store,
And, by the genius that was his, and thine,
From the rich veins of an unfathomed mine
To pile a faultless pyramid of ore.

XI.

Thou art thy people's Spenser, skill'd to paint
Unfading pictures of a world long dead.
Thine was an age of colour and romance,
Of martial pageant, swords that glimmered red,
Warm serenade, slow pomp and stately dance,
Bright robes and customs quaint.
Then life had mysteries of sea and sky;
Waters there were, unvoyaged, lands untrod:
Men felt the presence of an unseen God,
Wondered, and worshipped—but they asked not why.

XII.

Ours is an age of question: not the scorn
  Which trembles on the veilèd face of Truth,
    Not the hush'd laughter of the mighty dead
  Warning us, half in anger, half in ruth,
    How "fools rush in where angels fear to tread";
      No, nor the years unborn
  Murmuring down the ages, "Wait awhile!"—
    Not all the frowns of Nature, can withhold
    Our impious fingers from forbidden gold:
  When Nature frowns, we swear it is her smile.

XIII.

Ours is an age of traffic and unrest:
  Like wind men stream along, but not like wind
    They snatch no respite from their hard-won speed,
  Or Time would laugh and leave them far behind.
    Pleasure, and always pleasure is their need;
      To have, is to be blest;
  And while they struggle vainly for the prize,
    Out on some quiet unsuspected isle
    Th' unlettered heathen holds it all the while,
  And lives his simple life, and loves, and dies.